

Bob Monroe Research Lab Report

During the last decade of the 20th Century, our research effort used quantitative methods like laboratory experiments and numerical methods such as statistical modeling. The effort was objective versus subjective and aimed at prediction and control of the supposed neurological underpinnings of the Hemi-Sync[®] effect versus an explanation and understanding of the phenomenon and the subjective experiences of practitioners.

Exposing people to various conditions, etc., even in the name of quantitative science, may undermine their self-respect, their psychological integrity, their sense of self-determination, or even their physical health and the very first-person experience they are seeking with the Hemi-Sync process. In such studies it is the reliance on measurement that is disturbing. While reducing everything to numbers may be justified in the physical sciences, doing the same to human experience seems to dismiss the other, non-quantitative dimensions of that experience. How do you quantify meaning, for example, of love, or anger, or confusion? You can describe the Grand Canyon using only numbers—but somehow that wouldn't capture the essence of it.

With quantitative research, in order to find the relationship between two variables all others must be controlled, whether by a reduction of actual variety, or by the establishment of control groups, or by statistically factoring out other variables. But how do you control the lifetime of events that a person brings to a Hemi-Sync experience? What is the significance of a causal relation that does not occur independently outside the laboratory? And do results established by examining group tendencies then apply to individuals? Control is problematic in complex physical systems; imagine the problem with human beings.

Qualitative research involves the use of data such as interviews, documents, and participant observation, to understand and explain phenomena. The researcher looks at it from all perspectives, using all available senses, even attending to thoughts and feelings.

This is made possible by understanding intentionality and practicing bracketing.

1. Intentionality means being open to all aspects of the phenomenon, not leaving out what belongs. Intending acts might include seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking, judging. Intended objects are the sights seen, the words heard, the feeling felt, the thoughts thought, the ideas judged, and so on. Note that intended objects include not only objects in the traditional sense but also such things as feelings, thoughts, and ideas.
2. Bracketing is the other side of the coin. Bracketing means setting aside all usual, "natural" assumptions about the phenomena under study. Practically speaking, this means researchers must put aside biases, prejudices, theories, philosophies, religions, even common sense, and accept the phenomenon for what it is. If therapists brought all their prejudices into the therapy situation with them, they would never be able to understand their clients in all their frustrating uniqueness. The same is true for any phenomenon.

In mainstream quantitative research knowledge means measurement, cause-and-effect, and reductionism. So a research psychologist might say that anger is “really” sympathetic nervous system activation, or that blue is “really” certain wavelengths of electromagnetic energy, or that thoughts are “really” just neural activity.

Yet these explanations are nowhere to be found in the first-person experience itself. So bracketing ultimately means a suspension of belief in the existence or non-existence of the phenomenon. At TMI we must not be concerned with explanations of what the phenomenon “really” might be. We must use qualitative research so the phenomena of consciousness exploration can flourish wildest a knowledge base grows.

The Institute’s qualitative consciousness studies need to focus on an interpretive approach. The philosophical base of interpretive research is hermeneutics and phenomenology. As to a research methodology, a combination of case study research and ethnographic research seems appropriate. Initially, data collection can be through the use of participant applications and existing in-program questionnaires. Analysis of the collected data will be examined with three different techniques: hermeneutics, semiotics, and the narrative and metaphor method.

We have completed quantitative, positivist studies on the brainwave changes associated with Hemi-Sync stimulation. We continue conducting practical exercises validating the unbound perceptual venues available to those experiencing focused states of consciousness. Furthermore, we developed methods for the qualitative analysis of subjective reports collected during the explorations of Focus 27 “territories” and beyond.

The next three to five years should see the refinement of non-numerical unstructured data indexing, searching, and theorizing of the further information collected by explorers of Focus 27 “territories” and beyond as well as the STARLINES material. It is expected that such refinement will allow us to study data and ideas, and to minimize clerical routine and maximize flexibility. More importantly it should allow us to discover new ideas and build on them. It is these new ideas that will drive the research effort and the work of the Bob Monroe Research Lab in the 21st Century.